DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 880 CG 023 975

AUTHOR Margolin, Edythe
TITLE Technological Impact on Women's Ethical Choices in the 21st Century.
PUB DATE 1 Nov 91
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Women, Technology and Ethics Conference (Morehead, KY, November 1-2, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Children; *Decision Making; *Ethics; *Females; *Futures (of Society); *Technology

ABSTRACT

The continuing questions and urgencies regarding women's place in society and their role in self-direction for women and for the younger generation will involve several human qualities. These include the humanitarian qualities of vigilance, a desire for equitable treatment of people, and an awareness of the need to be skillful in the recognition of situations that can lead toward self-destruction. People must learn to accept technologies but also to recognize how these technologies can overrun concerns for equitable treatment of people. Solutions to issues of the 21st century are in process today. How those issues are viewed and how they are defined initially will affect choices. The economy, environmental challenges, medical issues, and family living patterns change. It cannot be known today which ideas, people, or concepts will be appealing in the future; some issues encompassing the society of the future may be shaping now, but are not yet clearly defined. It becomes increasingly clear that women, children, and youth at various stages of their lives will face dilemmas and choices related to technologies. There is satisfaction in knowing that although the current generation may not be alive to see the future results of their activity, they are nevertheless acting as worthy and ethical human beings with a sense of awareness that humanity needs its support. (ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED341880

Dr. Edythe Margolin, Coordinator/Professor
Interdisciplinary Major in Child Development
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, California 91330

November 1, 1991

Technological Impact on Women's Ethical Choices in the 21st Century

Introduction

"Technology brings to mind the inventions and inventiveness of our contemporary society. We are amazed daily by the kinds of things that machines and products of those machines can do for us. Technology, created by the minds of men and women, also relates to ethical choices which have to take place in the consciences and intellects of men and women. Our society today and in the future must decide how to direct ourselves in the use of various technologies as they affect the humanity, and the human spirit of people who experience them.

Who are the conscience keepers in society? Who creates the rules or laws that guide us in using machinery, products, medicine that will affect the maintenance of quality in our lives? Who protects the poor, the uninformed, and the innocent? Which institutions are guardians of the well-being of children now and in the future? This paper proposes to discuss some of those issues.

Thematic Dimensions

This paper has three major themes. The first theme suggests that we need to clarify our thinking and definitions when we say we are looking at issues related to women. Are we talking about women of **all ages** at various stages of their lives, women of various income levels, women who have various skills and talents, women of specific professions or occupations? The second theme focuses on **children** who are the responsibility of men and women at different times of their lives. How are they supposed to be affected by new technologies and ethical commitments? Third, what are the **images** created for us in current literature, the arts, and television that provide us with some guidance as to what our choices ought to be when we think of ethical self-directions?

CG023975

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Edythe Margolin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

All three of those themes must be considered in a context of the multicultural mixtures in society today. People whose norms and values have been partially developed in a country of their birth but who live in a country whose values and norms are new to them are trying to adapt to the daily events in their second or third society. Thus we have three major ideas that are set into a context of multicultural populations and languages. Those of us in the professions, sciences and arts are attempting to understand how those themes can be understood so that we will be able contribute to our society.

Theme I. Defining the Population of Women Who Are in "Women 's Issues"

Which women are we thinking about when we discuss women's issues? Are we thinking of women in the work force outside the home eight hours each day? Are we thinking of the middle- or high-income women of professional maturity? Are we thinking of women who are on social welfare? Are we thinking of homeless women with or without children? Are we thinking of the teen-aged unwed mother who has to take care of her herself and her baby in some way? How different the needs of these women are from one another.

Women's issues vary in terms of their marital, social, economic, and physical conditions. They vary in terms of whether women are able to support themselves in some way. They vary in terms of whether women have a quality of life that fits their choices. It is not difficult to understand the kind of issues that perplex a women who can barely survive as being very different from the psychological headaches a women might have who is not certain of accepting a marriage partner.

Literature has shown us that our choices for life styles become more related to a "quality" of how we ought to live when we have more financial resources to make a choice. The less money we have, the more we must be concerned with having food, shelter and at least a bare subsistence. When we have only a temporary means for food, shelter, and clothing we live differently than we do when we know we have a steady income or source of employment. Many of us have experienced uncertainty of income at various times in lives. Those of us who were preparing ourselves for a profession or occupation, however, at least knew we would have a steady

income some day. The homeless or social welfare recipients do not have that assurance.

Different age groups, such as teen-agers between 13 and 19 surely look at life differently when they think of themselves as part of the female population. How are they to manage in their roles as women growing to maturity? To whom should they look for models to emulate and discover how they ought to act if they wish to be accepted in groups they admire?

We know that our society does not clearly define the roles of teenagers seeking to become part of the work force and to create families which are a significant part of our social structure. We know that the alienation that many of our teenagers feel from our society or specific adults in it displace an energy that could be used for constructive activity.

How do women in their thirties or forties view what society has to offer them? Do they feel that they have received fair treatment from men and the technological resources in our society? And, of course, women in their sixties, seventies and eighties have many opinions on what American society's images are of them. If youth is of greater importance in American society, what roles do women have who are no longer physically young? Who decides these issues and how are they decided?

It is interesting to note that when women's behavioral traits are not related to the institution of family or the work force, their roles are not clearly defined. This is also true of teenagers and the older population. Our social structure is definedin relatively greater clarity when roles are associated with the family or with work. When the family has grown and the children no longer need the physical or financial protection from parents or other responsible adults, role characteristics or statuses are not as clear. What is unfortunate, however, is that the roleless recipients think that something is wrong them as individuals. They do not realize that society has not provided a "blueprint role" for them. They blame themselves for having a deficiency in their personalities. It affects their mental health as well as their motivation for life and joyousness.

Theme II. Children's Well-Being in a Technological and Ethical Society

What should our children know about directing their behavior in society today? Who is responsible for the images they form about how they ought to act? Even if parents are expected to help them, is this always done in an appropriate context or are the children abused? Who is expected to oversee fair and equitable treatment of children?

We are often in a dilemma when we think about our parents' warnings and advice regarding our proper behavior. On the one hand, we have adopted some of their values as our own. On the other hand, we have through our teen and adult years begun to question the reasoning or justification for some of those values. We may have adapted our own views. We may have decided to go against what they said. We may also have decided to be somewhat less exact in our interpretation of what they expected of us. In any case, we have adapted to their values, have altered them radically, or have decided to keep them totally intact as we learned about them. We need to consider how we will transmit our specific views to our children.

If we are concerned about the well-being of children in a technological and ethical society, what are we saying to them about their motives in behavior? How are we teaching them to speak to others and to guide themselves in making apropriate and ethical decisions? From the time children are young, we are models for their behavior to others inside and outside our homes. What rationales do they hear from us when we explain to one another why we said what we did or made certain decisions when interacting with others? These issues are central to shaping our children's values and personalities. Children will imitate our behavior or adapt to it whether we ask them to or not. They will act in ways that are suitable for their own patterns of behaving.

Our own parental ethics for feelings of responsibility for children guide us in the way we interact with them. We will teach them what we think is important for them to know. Our children will need strong guidelines from adults who are sensitive to many aspects of society. Adults need to help children know how to respond to people who have grown up in backgrounds that differ from their own familiar neighborhoods. Children will also need to know how to help others. It is also necessary that they know how

to restrain themselves from taking advantage of weakness or kindness in others.

Self-control and self-assessment in growing up are crucial to becoming a sensitive individual. A level of concern for the well-being and fair treatment of others has to run through our daily interaction with others. Ethical and fair treatment of others comes from those who are respectful of human dignity. What kind of parents are able to show children how to exercise a sense of fair play? How have they been taught? From where do we receive a sense of dignity and the need to treat others in the same way? If we receive some of our ideas from our family settings, how do families shape their ideas relative to their cultural settings? This question relates to the social context and the ways in which we receive impressions from our public surroundings.

Theme III. Images Created in Media and Arts for Ethical Self-Direction

We must remember that goals are different for the media, news, television dramas, documentaries than are the goals for the arts, such as music, poetry, literature, dance, sculpture, painting, for example. Goals for the media are often related to giving news that can be eye- (or ear-) catching as well as stimulating and worthy of holding the attention of an audience. Television drama or series often center around dilemmas the protagonists face and how they solve those problems. In that sense, while characters are shown involved in crime, destitution, shootouts, deceitful scenarios, this does not mean that all of American society live in that manner. Often, however, an American audience perceives it as such. Some members of society think that much of American life in television is depicted as sinful, valueless, and without moral commitments to guide people in a wholesome manner.

Because the shoddy aspects of American life are shown on television and in the news, does not mean that those decadent themes are recommended or held up as excusable acts. While television studios and guiding executives compete for the attention of audiences in order to attract advertisers to pay for television time on each channel, their goal is not to advocate for the seedy elements in American life. They try to present, justifiably or not, what they think viewers want.

It is unfortunate that with vivid presentations of some of the worst aspects of society that we want to see, such as police beatings of minority people and of various aberrations from values that we respect in our society, our tolerance for ugliness is mediated. The more we see of alleged killers on trial in court and the more we hear about accounts of rapes and murders, the more we are aware that those acts are very frequent. These elements affect our children and youth. They think those acts are simply the "way life is." People in the family and home have to be all the more responsible in leavening the children's philosophies about the way life can be. Children and youth have to be guided in continuing to abhor the idea of being a part of or attracted in any way to a life related to crime, suicides, killing.

So it is, that while television attempts to show life as it is and to present it in vividly descriptive terms, this becomes, sadly enough, a message for some that life is simply that way. People begin to think that we have to accept it. We do not want children and youth to think in those terms. We do not want them to think that acts of deviance, stealing, and raping others are representative of what society is willing to accept.

Popular literature, the arts, painting, sculpture, music and other forms of artistic expression represent individual feelings about experiences in life. Here again, expressive arts represent an arousal of emotions, an attempt to provide a message in some cases of how an individual views life. Expressive arts reach the public in many ways. They impress people. They direct people in their thinking, feeling, and acting.

Dramatic presentations often involve the ironies and contradictions in life. These perceptions are not representative of the values we wish to instruct our children and youth. They often show someone who may hide out from the police or be able to avoid facing responsiblity for taking the life of another. These life stories or dramas show the unique, the sensational, and the pretentiousness in people's lives. They are not held up as examples of behavior to be emulated. Children and youth, however, need guidance in the interpretation of these dramas. While we may say that are aware that what was done was wrong, they do see people avoiding accountablity for their actions. The writers often portray the actors in such a manner that one wants to sympathize with their feelings. It is easy

to have compassion for the perpetrator of a wrongful act who was abused as a child or mistreated by parents or others (particularly if a viewer experienced abuse as a child).

Censorship has often been argued in a democratic society. Most people do not applaud the idea that will constrain people's opportunities to voice their views. In fact, when people discuss their ideas, they are in a more favorable position to hear other views and perhaps alter what many may think are ideas that can be detrimental to the productivity of any society. Open discussion is considered productive and ought not be constrained in a democratic society.

While children and youth see the norms and values in television and in the arts, how will they be guided toward acceptance and commitment toward values that society considers worthy? Ethics relate to the means and ends question. In order to accomplish one's goals, for example, is it fair to take something from someone else without their knowledge? In order to win a race, is it fair to cause an opponent's fall? How may we allow others to have their fair chance at winning or achieving success? To what degree do we help others at the expense of losing what we wish to have?

From whom will children learn their sense of fairness and good conscience? Where do women acquire a sense of what it means to be a decent and nondeceptive person? While they are attempting to seek social, financial, and professional opportunities, how are women going to decide when and how to activate their own consciences? How can men and women alert children to sensitive issues needing discussion and choices? Questions that call into action an inner dialogue regarding what is just and proper also involve an ongoing need to weigh in the balance certain elements in events that confront us toward making ethical choices for our behavior.

The contradictory aspects resulting from famous leaders making statements written by speechwriters give the public flashy words that often upon analysis do not convey much meaning. Political seasons in television provide an overload of terms to attract public attention. Yet often the statements do not mean very much in regard to the ways an individual may expect the future to be improved.

Children and youth expect integrity from leaders in American society. How will parents interpret honesty and goodwill of leaders to their children? Again, parents have to guide their children in sorting out what is worthy of commitment for ethical directions and behavior in their lives.

Whose ethics are central in these transmissions to children? Whose ethics become accepted and applauded by a majority society? Whose ethics become grist for the spokesperson's mill in society? It is hard to know. Ethical positions are taken by various people at various times. They may be in the guise of political issues. They may be made by activist groups presenting their call for equal rights and fair treatment and respect in society.

Writers of contemporary literature--be they popular, professional, or scientific-- have myriad viewpoints. The audience of scientific literature may be researchers and appreciators of the exactness of scientific studies in medicine, space, oceanography, child development. The audience for contemporary professional writings may be people who are in various professions and interested in keeping updated in their fields. The audience for popular literature can cut across all fields and all strata of society. Considering this mixture, then, how do children become involved in knowing what to accept as valid guidance? Parents and teachers, who make up these various audiences transmit some of these personally interpreted values to children and youth. What is considered appropriate by the adults will be given in some way-- directly or indirectly--to the children.

Concluding Questions and Comments

How can we draw together the meaning and symbolization in women's minds at different stages and ages and income levels of different professions and occupations and their perceptions of society relative to their fair chances?How should we reconcile the various viewpoints that appear to many of us to be negative or positive from the political, the professional, or artistic arenas? How do we help children and youth learn to deal with issues that can become more complex in their adult years?

The continuing questions and urgencies regarding women's place in society, their role in self-direction for women and for the younger new generation directly under our control will involve several human qualities. We must generate humanitarian qualities of vigilance, a desire for equitable treatment of people, and an awareness of the need to be skillful in the recognition of situations that can lead toward self-destruction. We must learn to accept technologies but also to recognize how they can over run our concerns for equitable treatment of people. We must realize that often what we value for luxurious living may also lead toward an ennui that stifles our interest in solving difficulties of others less fortunate then we.

Solutions to issues of the twenty-first century are in process today. How we view those issues and of course how we define them initially will affect our choices. It is puzzling and challenging that we cannot know what the context or *Weltanschauung* of our future society will be. Our economy changes. The environmental and ecological challenges change. Technologies introduce new elements that are not obvious at the moment except to some small group of scientists working on specific problems. Medical issues change. Family patterns of living change. What may have shocked or surprised us at one time in society's history does not do so today. Our psyches change. We sense an identification with certain people and a disconnection from others, for whatever reasons. We cannot know today, however, which ideas, people, or concepts will appeal to us when the issues encompassing society in the future may be shaping now, but are not clearly defined.

While society changes and we try to define what the issues of the future may be, we are looking at elements of society <u>today</u>. We are trying to deal with them now. We are <u>not aware that we are part of a developing set of key ideas that will become issues of the future.</u> History will record that just as the Renaissance era was defined and named after it occurred, not during the lifetime of the people who experienced it.

The characteristics of unawareness and of unself-consciousness related to being a part of a shaping society which can lead to difficult issues in the future reinstates feelings of insecurity. We can also have, however, with a sense of humility, the knowledge that our own self-preservation

can be ensured at least in part by our own vigilance. We can seek dignity in ourselves. We can search for and sustain attitudes of respect for others. We can also decide to protect society in the form of each individual who should have a fair chance for "the pursuit of happiness," which is a strong and pervasive American value.

In closing, it becomes increasingly clear that women, children, and youth at various stages of their lives will face dilemmas and choices related to technologies resulting in life being made easier for them. Technologies related to medical procedures, illness, disease, poverty, laws, birth processes and the production of families will become almost miracles changing and challenging the human spirit. We will have opportunities to rejoice as well as to ponder over successes which often have advantages and disadvantages in their wake. Successes change lives and the way people make decisions. In any case, we will have to remember that ethical decisions should be guiding us in affluent as well as poverty- stricken contexts. Women will be faced with decisions often questioned by their children. Men will be faced with simliar circumstances of being challenged by decisions they make. How responsible couples make their choices depends on their consciences, backgrounds, and commitments to various ideals and goals.

We are responsible for and to the future generation. We cannot displace our obligations and expect anyone else to accept the challenge. We can, however, have satisfaction in knowing that although we may not be alive to see the future results of our activity, we are nevertheless acting as worthy and ethical human beings with a sense of awareness that humanity needs our support. What we do now becomes a part of history and a future strength in our children growing stronger toward adult stages of life.

****

*Notes:

1. Definition of "**technology transfer**: transfer of technical knowledge generated and developed in one place to another in order to achieve some practical end."--p. 1015 in *The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Lexicon Publications, Inc., 1988.

2. "Technology refers to the application of scientific knowledge to the application of a practical task." p. 591 in John E. Farley's *Sociology* , Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1990.

3. Society's environment refers to various environments to which society must adapt. "There is the *physical environment,* which includes climate, terrain, plant and animal life, and presence or absence of bodies of water. There is the *social environment*, which includes any other societies with which a society must interact. Finally, there is the *technological environment*, which is defined by the level of technologies available to a society. All of these represent realities to which a society must adapt, and they interactively define the conditions to which a society must respond. ..... It is the *combination* of the physical, social, and technological environments that defines the total environment to which a society must adapt." p. 94 in John E. Farley's *Sociology*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1990.